DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 177 407 CG 013 835

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TITLE Self-Consciousness and Body Image: Length and Accuracy of Self-Reports of Physical Characteristics.
PUB DATE Apr 79
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Western Psychological Association (59th, San Diego, California, April 5-8, 1979)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Body Weight; *Individual Characteristics; *Individual Differences; *Physical Characteristics; *Self Concept; *Self Evaluation; Sex Differences
IDENTIFIERS *Self Consciousness Scale (Fenigstein et al)

ABSTRACT

The extent to which private self-consciousness (as defined by Fenigstein, Scheier, and Buss, 1975) is related to the length and accuracy of self-reports concerning physical characteristics was investigated. In the first phase of the experiment subjects (N=87) listed their physical characteristics that they liked, disliked, or toward which they were neutral. In the second phase of the study, difference scores between subjects' estimates and actual measures of weight, height, chest size, and waist size were obtained. Results indicated that the amount and accuracy of knowledge about one's physical characteristics were significantly related to individual differences in private self-consciousness. (Author)

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ED177407

Self-Consciousness and Body Image: Length and Accuracy of Self-Reports of Physical Characteristics

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Self-Consciousness and Body Image: Length and Accuracy of Self-Reports of Physical Characteristics

Attention may be directed either toward the environment or toward the self. Focus of attention on the self has been labeled self-awareness (Duval & Wicklund, 1972; Wicklund, 1975). Although self-awareness can be induced in several ways (i.e., a tape recording of one's voice, the presence of an audience, or a video tape of one's actions) the most commonly employed manipulation has been the mirror (Carver & Scheier, 1978).

Fenigstein, Scheier, and Buss (1975) have called attention to individual differences in habitual self-focused attention. This disposition to focus attention inward is called self-consciousness and is measured by the Self-Consciousness Scale (Fenigstein et al., 1975). Factor analysis of the 23 items in this scale revealed two components of self-consciousness, private and public. A third factor labeled social anxiety was also extracted and is presumably a derivative of public self-consciousness. Private self-consciousness is the extent to which a person habitually reflects upon his thoughts, feelings, and motives. Public self-consciousness involves habitual concern about oneself as a social object, including social appearance and the impression one makes upon others. Social anxiety is defined by discomfort in the presence of others. Construct validity, discriminate validity, and reliability data for these three subscales are presented in Fenigstein et al., (1975), Carver and Glass (1976), Turner, Scheier, Carver, and Ickes (1978), and Turner (1978a).

Private self-consciousness should lead people to be aware of covert aspects of themselves. Consistent with this expectation, high compared to low private self-consciousness persons have been shown to be more aware of their behavioral tendencies (Scheier, Buss, & Buss, 1978; Turner, 1978b), emotions (Scheier & Carver, 1977), and sensory experience (Scheier, Carver, & Gibbons,

Note 1). In addition, high private self-consciousness persons have been reported to generate longer self-descriptions in an open-ended format (Turner, in press). Both more extended and more valid self-reports are consistent with the theoretical description of the high private self-consciousness person as one who, based upon habitual reflectiveness, has more extended and more accurate self-knowledge.

The present research investigated the relationship between private self-consciousness and awareness of physical characteristics. Awareness of physical characteristics was defined in terms of breadth and correctness of knowledge concerning one's physical features.

The impact of body image on behavior has been extensively discussed from a clinical viewpoint (Fisher, 1970; Hamacheck, 1971); however, few direct investigations of individual differences in the amount and accuracy of knowledge of one's physical characteristics have been reported (exceptions being, Shontz, 1969, Traub & Orbach, 1964). In addition, most of these studies have produced inconsistent or negative results (Shontz, 1969, pp. 184-201).

The initial phase of the study was to have subjects list their physical characteristics that they liked, disliked, or neither liked nor disliked. High private self-consciousness subjects were expected to list more characteristics in each category than were the low private self-consciousness group. In the second phase of the experiment the relationship between the self-consciousness subscale and accuracy of knowledge about one's physical characteristics was investigated. Subjects were asked to report their height, weight, waist size and chest size. The reports of high private self-consciousness subjects were expected to be more accurate than the reports of low scorers on this subscale. This prediction was based on an extrapolation of the results of Scheier, Buss, and Buss (1978) and Turner (1978b) showing that high private

self-consciousness subjects gave more predictively valid self-reports of personality characteristics than did subjects low in private self-consciousness.

Also included in the analysis of this data was an indication of whether the subject was above or below the national average weight for males or females of their age and height (World Almanac, 1978). According to Calden, Lundy, and Schlafer (1959), women tend to desire smaller physical features, except for bust size, than their actual measurements whereas men desire to be larger than they actually are. Thus a significant interaction was predicted showing larger discrepancies between reported and real sizes for small compared to large males and large compared to small females.

Method

Subjects were 87 students (48 females; 39 males) from an introductory social science course who participated for course credit. During the first week of class subjects completed the Self-Consciousness Scale (Fenigstein et al., 1975) during a group testing period. Three to seven weeks later subjects individually reported for the laboratory session where they were met by one male and one female experimenter. Throughout the experiment all instructions were given by the experimenter of the same sex as the subject.

Upon their arrival for the laboratory session, subjects were seated and instructed to fill out a "Physical Evaluation Form." The Physical Evaluation Form instructed the subject to: "Describe yourself physically, listing what you like, dislike, or are neutral toward (don't particularly like or dislike) concerning your physical characteristics." The remainder of the page consisted of three columns respectively labeled: characteristics I like; characteristics I dislike; and characteristics I neither like nor dislike.
The experimenters left the room after telling subjects that they had ten minutes to complete the form.

Ten minutes after leaving the subjects to complete the Physical Evaluation Form, the experimenters returned, collected the self-report form, and read the following:

> The second part of this experiment is a study comparing the extent to which observers can accurately judge the physical characteristics of others. Please fill out the following form to the best of your knowledge. Don't let us see the form until after we have completed our's on you. After we finish, we will tell you our estimates. You can then tell us the extent to which we were correct.

Subjects were then given a "Physique Estimate Form" which asked for their best estimates of their weight in pounds, height in feet and inches, waist size in inches, and chest size in inches. To be consistent with the instructions, the experimenters also completed this form at the same time as the subject.

After completing their estimates, all subjects were weighed and measured before being debriefed and dismissed.

In the columns of the Physical Evaluation Form if a subject wrote an unquantifiable entry such as "everything" or "all my characteristics," this subject's data were not included in analyses of responses to that column. This procedure resulted in 83 subjects providing lists of liked and neither liked nor disliked characteristics and 84 providing lists of disliked characteristics. All 87 subjects correctly completed the remaining experimental forms.

Data from the second part of the experiment were analyzed via two separate 2x2x2 factorial analyses of variance where the three independent variables were: (1) sex, (2) high/low private self-consciousness, and (3) whether the

subject was above or below the national average weight for males or females of their age and height (World Almanac, 1978). To obtain the dependent variable, subjects' estimates of their physical characteristics were subtracted from the actual measures of these characteristics. For each physical characteristic the absolute values of these difference scores were converted to their standard Z score equivalents. The dependent variable for each subject consisted of the sum of these four Z scores. Thus a negative sum would indicate that the discrepancies between the subject's estimates and his real measurements were smaller than average while a positive score meant that the subject's difference scores were larger than average.

Results

High private self-consciousness persons were expected to list more physical characteristics in the three categories than were low private self-consciousness persons. Consistent with these predictions, subjects high in private self-consciousness listed significantly more disliked characteristics ($F = 5.73$, $df = 1,75$, $p < .02$) and more characteristics neither liked nor disliked ($F = 4.18$, $df = 1,74$, $p < .05$). These subjects listed a mean of 4.08 (S.D. = 2.40) disliked characteristics and 3.10 (S.D. = 1.97) characteristics neither liked nor disliked compared to 2.98 (S.D. = 1.61) and 2.09 (S.D. = 1.90), respectively, for persons low in private self-consciousness. Contrary to predictions, no significant group differences occurred on the number of liked characteristics listed.

Accuracy of Estimates of Physical Measures

As discussed earlier, the outcome measure in the second phase of the experiment was the sum of the Z score equivalents of the discrepancies between subjects' estimates and their actual measurements of the four physical characteristics (height, weight, chest size, and waist size). This procedure resulted

in a dependent variable with $\bar{X}$ = .00 and S.D. = 2.33 for the 87 subjects. Thus negative values would denote smaller than average discrepancy scores (accurate estimates) while positive values signify larger than average discrepancy scores (inaccurate estimates). The 2x2x2 analysis of variance design employed as independent variables: sex, weight (above or below average for one's height and age), and low/high levels of private self-consciousness.

A significant main effect was predicted since high compared to low private self-consciousness persons were expected to have smaller discrepancy scores. Although group means differed in the predicted direction, this effect failed to reach an acceptable level of statistical significance ($F = 2.71$, $df = 1,71$, $p = .10$).

Although the predicted main effect did not result, levels of private self-consciousness did significantly interact with both sexes ($F = 3.94$, $df = 1,71$, $p = .05$) and weight ($F = 5.57$, $df = 1,71$, $p < .02$). The group means for these interactions are shown in the upper two-thirds of Table 1.

Insert Table 1 Here

For the private self-consciousness by sex interaction, post hoc tests of the simple effects of high and low private self-consciousness for both sexes

revealed the discrepancy scores of high private self-consciousness females to be significantly lower (denoting greater accuracy of estimates) than those of low private self-consciousness females ($t = 3.05$, $df = 71$, $p < .005$). For males, the low instead of the high private self-consciousness groups gave the most accurate estimates, although the two group means did not significantly differ ($t = 1.04$, $df = 71$, n.s.). Thus general reflectiveness was related to accurate estimates of physical characteristics in females but not males.

Post hoc comparisons of the simple effects of levels of private self-consciousness at the two levels of weight (below and above average) resulted in a significant difference for overweight subjects but not for underweight subjects. High private self-consciousness subjects who were overweight gave significantly more accurate estimates than overweight low self-consciousness subjects ($t = 2.69$, $df = 71$, $p < .01$).

As predicted, a significant interaction between sex and size resulted ($F = 4.53$, $df = 1,71$, $p < .05$). Group means presented in the lower third of Table 4 are consistent with the expectations of less accurate reports of physical dimensions for below average weight compared to above average weight males and for above average weight compared to below average weight females. Analysis of the simple effects of these differences reached acceptable levels of statistical significance only for females ($t = 1.99$, $df = 71$, $p = .05$).

Discussion

The basic purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between individual differences in self-consciousness and breadth and correctness of knowledge about one's physical characteristics. Based upon the results the amount and accuracy of knowledge about one's physical characteristics would seem to be consistently related to individual differences in general reflectiveness as measured by the Private Self-Consciousness subscale.

The secondary analysis in the second phase of the experiment extended the report of Calden et al. (1959) by showing that not only do men desire larger physical characteristics while women desire to be smaller but that larger men and smaller women give more accurate estimates of their physical characteristics. Since these groups are at a more culturally ideal size than are small men and large women, they may more closely monitor their size, and thus are able to give more accurate estimates. Alternatively, small men and large women may simply distort their estimates to appear closer to the cultural ideal.

In conclusion, high compared to low private self-consciousness subjects listed more characteristics that they disliked or were neutral toward. In addition, high private self-consciousness females were more accurate in their estimates of their physical measurements than were females low in private self-consciousness. Thus private self-consciousness has been shown to be related to length and veridicality of self-reports of physical characteristics as well as personality descriptions (Scheier et al., 1978; Turner, 1978; in press).

Footnotes

1. The assistance of Mike Aamodt, Terrye Cheathem, Cynthia Laird, Patti Morris, Mike Hughes, and Daniel Velasco is gratefully acknowledged.

2. Requests for reprints should be sent to:

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Reference Notes

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Table 1

Group Means, Standard Deviations, and Group Sizes for Significant Interaction Effects in the Analysis of Standardized Composite Scores of Differences Between Estimates and Actual Measures of Four Physical Characteristics

	Private Self-Consciousness	
Sex	Low	High
Males	-.39 (1.60) N=23	.36 (2.67) N=16
Females	1.14 (2.86) N=23	-.93 (1.41) N=25

	Private Self-Consciousness	
Weight	Low	High
Below Average	-.40 (1.51) N=16	.05 (2.35) N=21
Above Average	.79 (2.96) N=30	-.93 (1.25) N=20

	Weight	
Sex	Below Average	Above Average
Males	.49 (2.04) N=17	-.52 (1.17) N=22
Females	-.69 (1.34) N=26	.60 (2.88) N=22